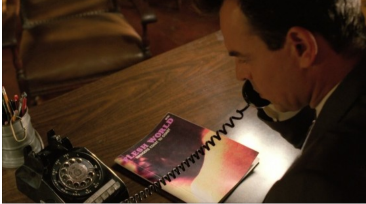
A Place Beyond the Pines: Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me, the Missing Pieces, and the Legacy of Brutality

cinema-scope.com/features/place-beyond-pines-twin-peaks-fire-walk-missing-pieces-legacy-brutality/

Jordan Cronk 9/16/2014



By Jordan Cronk

It's an odd feeling—in fact, it borders on the disconcerting. Could this be it, the conclusion of the *Twin Peaks* saga, more than 24 years after ABC first broadcast the show's pilot episode on an otherwise unexceptional Sunday evening in the spring of 1990? Seemingly so much and so little has transpired in the interim for the show's creators, its stars, and its legacy alike, and yet its central anomalies are such that the intrigue has only deepened as the years have passed. That disarming ambiguity—that sense of the intangible and unknowable embedded in such elemental visual iconography—has always been an undeniable component of *Twin Peaks*' allure. When the show went off the air in June 1991, it concluded with perhaps the most startling reversal in the history of the medium, effectively merging the roles of its primary protagonist and antagonist and upending assumptions and expectations for serialized television in the process. It ended, in other words, perfectly—if also paradoxically and more than a bit perplexingly.

The notion of elaborating on the *Twin Peaks* narrative was thus always, in theory, somewhat antithetical to its ethos. It's appropriate, then—and considering the personnel, all but inevitable—that David Lynch's feature-film prequel *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992) did more to complicate than elucidate the implications and absurdities of the series, raising more questions about the characters, their motivations, their actions, and their fates than it answered—not to mention the dead end it left regarding the events immediately preceding the Laura Palmer narrative. This inaccessibility, coupled with the film's forthright depictions of incest and sexual brutality, didn't sit well with many *Twin Peaks* fans—not to mention critics (choice Vincent Canby line: "It's not the worst movie ever made; it just seems to be")—and so consigned *Fire Walk With Me* to the status of an unfortunate addendum to the show's uneven yet charmingly illogical arc. Rumours persisted, however, that Lynch had shot a nearly four-hour film but was forced by New Line Cinema to cut it down to a somewhat more reasonable 135 minutes—which led many to the logical conclusion (which is never something to pursue when approaching a Lynch film anyway) that the director, had he been allowed the freedom, would have

clarified such outstanding story conundrums (as if that was ever one of his, or the series', fundamental pursuits). For many fans and critics, then, these 90-plus minutes of excised footage became the key to unlocking the enigma that is *Fire Walk With Me*.

In the years since, *Fire Walk With Me* has been reclaimed as one of Lynch's masterpieces, so the prospect of closing the circle on "the entire mystery" (as the title of CBS/Paramount's new *Twin Peaks* Blu-ray box set so tantalizingly suggests) is at once thrilling and unnerving in its ramifications. Do we even want, or need, the mystery solved at this point—and if so, then what? The deleted scenes—or as they're now called, "The Missing Pieces"—from *Fire Walk With Me* have been tied up in legal drama for so long that they've become something of a proverbial gray purgatory between the Black and White Lodges of *Twin Peaks*' shadow realm. Every time since the beginning of the series that viewers thought they had an answer to any given riddle, Lynch has proceeded to change the question (and usually added a follow-up for good measure). After all, the catalyst of the series—those four little words, "Who killed Laura Palmer?"—was once and for all confronted in the climatic moments of Season 2, Episode 7, and yet here we are more than two decades later attempting to come to grips with dozens of other lingering confusions. That the Missing Pieces both augment and alleviate some of this discomfort is apt in terms of both precedent and presentation.

Let's Rock

One of the important aspects to note regarding the Missing Pieces is their organization. Directed and edited by Lynch himself (who oversaw the restoration of the entire set), this collection of 33 scenes, sequences, and snippets is no haphazard dump of experiments or outtakes: in many cases, the "pieces" are fully realized episodes betraying the same sense of absurdity, surrealism, and melodrama as the series, while others are subtle protractions of familiar moments and still others are indeed incidental grace notes that would have lightly shaded rather than enhanced the finished film. But what's remarkable about the entire, seamlessly edited 90-minute suite is its uniformity of vision. It is, inevitably, a kind of sweeping supplement to the film, yet each sequence is detailed and demarcated in such a manner as to facilitate mental integration into the whole with an easy, chronological fluidity. Such care and attention has gone into its realization that it's not difficult to imagine the Missing Pieces becoming an integral chapter of not only the *Twin Peaks* legend, but of David Lynch's greater catalogue. In light of the now eight-year filmmaking hiatus since *Inland Empire* (2006), Lynch's last completed feature, this act of overdue reconciliation on the part of the director feels rather more promising than all the activity related to music, carpentry, and coffee beans combined.

As for the deleted scenes themselves, they both confirm and contradict much of what has been speculated upon in the years since. Lynch has mentioned on a number of occasions

that nearly every major character in the series—or, at the very least, the major characters from his original conceptualization, which is to say the first season—was included in the film's script, which he co-wrote with Robert Engels. This does indeed turn out to be accurate, as previously absent *Twin Peaks* mainstays such as Sheriff Truman (Michael Ontkean), Deputy Hawk (Michael Horse), Deputy Andy (Harry Goaz), Lucy (Kimmy Robertson), Doctor Hayward (Warren Frost), Eileen Hayward (Mary Jo Deschanel), Josie Packard (Joan Chen), Pete Martell (Jack Nance), Major Briggs (Don S. Davis), Big Ed Hurley (Everett McGill), Nadine Hurley (Wendy Robie), and Doctor Jacoby (Russ Tamblyn) all make appearances. One of the major criticisms of *Fire Walk With Me* at the time was its lack of humour in comparison to the series, and these reinstatements, no matter how subordinate to the principal narrative, help restore some of the town's local colour.

The segment of *Fire Walk With Me* that many presumed would have left the most footage on the cutting-room floor, however, is its opening act, set one year before the events of the Laura Palmer murder. Teresa Banks (Pamela Gidley) was nothing more than a reference point in the series, a prior victim of a similar murder with parallels that Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) drew on for his current assignment. But in *Fire Walk With* Me, the investigation around Teresa's disappearance accounts for the entire opening 30 minutes of the film set in the nearby town of Deer Meadow, where we meet a host of new characters, including investigating officers Special Agent Chester Desmond (Chris Isaak) and Agent Sam Stanley (Kiefer Sutherland). It turns out that there was little extra footage shot for this section of the film, save for what would have been a new introduction of Cooper, wherein he chats from an office hallway with his forever-unseen confidant Diane, a brief moment with Cooper and Sam Stanley discussing the Teresa Banks autopsy, and an extended fight scene between Chester Desmond and the Deer Meadow law enforcement official Sheriff Cable (Gary Bullock), which, had it been included, could easily stand alongside the brawl in *They Live* (1988) as one of the most hilariously drawn-out skirmishes in contemporary cinema. Little if anything, however, is hinted at regarding the blue rose, Teresa Banks' ring, or the eventual disappearance of Chester Desmond—nor is it revealed just what that dirty old woman is doing wandering around the Fat Trout trailer park. These scenes, like the entire opening of the finished film, are contextual constituents fashioned to echo later occurrences rather than stand on their own.

Buenos Aires / Above the Convenience Store

Many of *Fire Walk With Me's* most baffling incidents transpire in a transitional sequence, set at the FBI headquarters in Philadelphia, which finally brings the film from Deer Meadow to Twin Peaks and into the days which will ultimately culminate in Laura Palmer's death. This is the scene which famously introduces the long-lost Agent Phillip Jeffries

(David Bowie) and then proceeds to not explain much about where he's been, what he's doing back, or where he subsequently disappears to. In expanded form, the sequence now includes an earlier scene set in Buenos Aires sometime in the weeks leading up to Jeffries' return to FBI headquarters, where we find him checking into the Palm Deluxe resort while questioning the concierge about a "Miss Judy." More importantly, back in Philadelphia, when he begins to explain his whereabouts to Cooper, Bureau Chief Gordon Cole (David Lynch) and forensic analyst Albert Rosenfeld (Miguel Ferrer), his account of the experience is no longer intercut with the activity ("one of their meetings") occurring in the room above the convenience store, where he claims to have been transported and where we know the residents of the Black Lodge reside when incarnated.

It's difficult in this instance to say Lynch made the wrong decision, since looking back at the finished sequence confirms that much of this information is in fact conveyed, albeit in a fractured, highly disorienting montage where voices become disembodied and the identities of those speaking is sometimes unclear. There's even a brief glimpse of Jeffries in Buenos Aires, but without the proper context it becomes all but impossible to see that his character is literally being shuffled between dimensions and locations, existing in a sort of parallel reality alongside our own. In the extended scene we see Jeffries reappear at the resort before being sucked back through what seems to be a wormhole, the physical toll and suffering brought on by the experience writ painfully across his face. As a result, more time is also given to Jeffries' vision of the residents of the Black Lodge and, in particular, the diminutive Man from Another Place (Michael J. Anderson), whose otherwise perplexing proclamations now betray one more particularly useful hint: "Going up and down. Intercourse between the two worlds."

The Palmers

Here's another scene that, perhaps in keeping with the darker tone of the film, was left out of the final cut, yet could have gone some way toward acclimating uneasy viewers to the more gravely humorous aspects of the narrative. Leland Palmer (Ray Wise), stomping his way into the dining room and demanding his dinner, sits down to inform his daughter Laura (Sheryl Lee) and his wife Sarah (Grace Zabriskie) that he'd like them to learn a phrase in Norwegian, as businessmen from Scandinavia will soon be arriving to work with him and the Horne family (one of the only major sets of characters from the series we don't see in any footage from the film), who employ Leland as their attorney. Leland then goes around the table teaching Laura and Sarah how to introduce themselves in Norwegian before all three break into an infectious bout of laughter that likely represents the only genuinely happy exchange between these characters in the entire film. As they continue to sit around the table, bonding over fits of uncontrollable laughter, suggesting for a moment the ordinary family they once were, an axe rests ominously in the background,

a reminder that this family's fate has long been foretold.

I'm the Muffin / The Ring

A seemingly unassuming scene between Laura and the Hayward family features an exchange which lends further credence to the theory that *Fire Walk With Me* actually has a happy ending—or, at the very least, one which acts as a kind of relief for both Laura and the viewer alike. Over a freshly baked batch of Mrs. Hayward's muffins, Donna (Moira Kelly, replacing the series' Sherilyn Fenn), Laura, and Doctor Hayward rest apprehensively on the living room couch before the latter pulls out piece of paper—"a secret message for Laura"—from which he reads aloud: "The angels will return. And when you see the one that's meant to help you, you will weep with joy." On its own, the passage is a comforting if esoteric bit of encouragement, but when considered alongside the film's repeated use of angelic imagery, including Laura's final encounter in the Red Room with what appears to be a divine guardian, it's rendered not only prophetic, but altogether inspiring.

Party Girl

Since more tangible information about Teresa Banks is provided in Leland's paranoid flashbacks than in the entirety of the film's opening act, it's unsurprising that the expanded scenes of these hallucinatory recollections would offer even more details about her life and personality. We now see Teresa arrange over the phone a sexual rendezvous with Leland, who in the film ducks out of the eventual tryst when one of the girls turns out to be his daughter. Teresa then calls Jacques Renault (Walter Olkewicz) to inquire family details about Laura and Ronette Pulaski (Phoebe Augustine), one of whom she believes was almost accidentally brought together with their father in an act of prostitution. The latter conversation is actually mentioned to Laura and Ronette during the film's dance club sequence, but visualizing both these phone call adds further dimension to the girls' associations with Teresa, Jacques, and *Flesh World* magazine, an issue of which becomes a key piece of evidence in the series.

Distant Screams

It's both obvious and understandable why this scene was cut: it's extremely short, features no verbal exposition, and has no bearing on the overall plot. And yet it's totally devastating, eavesdropping as it does on the Log Lady (Catherine Coulson), whom many read as the consciousness of the town and the soul of *Twin Peaks*, as tears stream down her face and the sounds of unspeakable torment and abuse echo in the distance.

Epilogue

At once the most surprising and most functional expansion to *Fire Walk With Me* is its extended coda, which ties the series and the film together in a way I imagine most disgruntled viewers would have appreciated. The big revelation here is that Lynch shot at least one scene that takes place after the conclusion of the series, and another which coincides with its final moments. In the film, Dale's love interest Annie Blackburn (Heather Graham) appears to Laura in a dream, bloodied and beaten and in the same dress she's wearing when the series ends. Annie's appearance in the film has always been one of the more temporally confounding aspects between the show and the film. Chronologically speaking, she is months away from appearing in the narrative, and yet here she is warning Laura of her fate.

"My name is Annie," she says. "I've been with Laura and Dale. The good Dale is in the Lodge and he can't leave. Write it in your diary." In a newly restored sequence we find Annie speaking these words from her bed in the hospital, where we learn in the show she's been taken following her exit from the Black Lodge. Arranged on a timeline, this sequence would be taking place during the final episode of the series as we witness Dale being overtaken by demon Killer Bob (Frank Silva). With this scene now available, it's clear that Annie is speaking from a future physical reality, while it likewise confirms the telepathic elements hinted at throughout the series. That the nurse also takes Teresa Banks' ring off Annie's finger only reinforces the show's theme of cyclical violence and the potentially infinite nature of the *Twin Peaks* narrative.

Dale, meanwhile, has just cracked his forehead on the bathroom mirror, coming face-to-face with the enemy. As the series ends, he's cackling about Annie and staring into the camera, Bob now fully inhabiting his newest vessel. In a brief continuation of this scene, we watch as Sheriff Truman and Doctor Hayward discover Cooper's prone body, lifting him to his feet and helping him regain his composure. Cooper claims to have slipped and hit his head on the mirror, which leads to a tensely humorous remark ("It struck me as funny, Harry. Do you understand me? It struck me as funny"), an appeal by Doctor Hayward to get him back into bed, and the typically Lynchian rebuttal, "But I haven't brushed my teeth yet." After two decades of speculation and anticipation for these scenes, the exchange plays as a deviously anti-climatic flourish—Lynch once again having the last laugh.